

7. Dragons, Wrestling, Detectives and More – Providing Reader's Advisory

Teens, like other readers, sometimes need guidance to help them find the types of materials they like. Summer is a great time to put your reader's advisory skills to work. In fact, it can be key to the success of your program.

The reader's advisory interview is crucial to providing service to teens. Their answers to your questions are critical to pointing the way to the materials they want, but their answers aren't always complete.

Ask them as many questions as necessary to find out what they like in a book, but be wary of them getting bored or impatient. Ask about genre, plot, characters/age of characters, etc. Ask about series, length of book and whether they prefer hardback or paperback. Even though all these questions won't apply to every teen, it is better to know than to recommend a 500-page book to a reluctant reader. That teen won't ever ask you for advice again.

The age of the characters in the story is important. Teens want to read about characters that are older than they are. They might read about teens their age, but they definitely don't want to read about teens younger than them.

Have a list of titles or authors handy for recommending a good read. The list should include several different genres, lengths and character ages.

Know the titles/authors of various genres. Even when you haven't read the book you can recommend it! If you haven't read the book and are recommending it to fill a certain request, have the teen tell you what they think after they have read the book. This can act as a tool for recommending it in the future.

Give them plenty of choices without being overwhelming.

You may hear, "I just want a good book." Try to find out the last good book these teens read and what was good about it. Ask them about the types of books that they like to read. They don't always know a genre, but they will know what aspects of the book they liked. Try to focus on those key elements, rather than an author or title.

Read as many young adult titles as possible! You can know much more about a book's appeal to different teens if you know the book.

Teens won't always ask for your assistance when selecting a book. For those times there are other ways to help...

1. Be in the stacks or wherever teens are browsing without seeming to monitor them. Watch how they are browsing and what they are selecting. Do they seem to have difficulty in selecting a book? If so, start conducting a brief interview, or talk about a particular book that is the same genre or author as the one they were looking at previously. Or, ask if they would like help selecting a book. Become skilled at recognizing which teens are just browsing and which teens will welcome your help.
2. Many teens like to choose their own materials. Have plenty of booklists or displays to guide teens to the materials they like. Place them in many different areas in the teen section.
3. Place publishers catalogs, teen magazine reviews, review journals, or other review sources in the teen section. If you don't have space for lots of materials, put clippings in the area.

Remember...

Reader's advisory work is important to providing excellent library service to teens and it will make their participation in the summer reading program much more rewarding!